Copenhagen as a Speech Community

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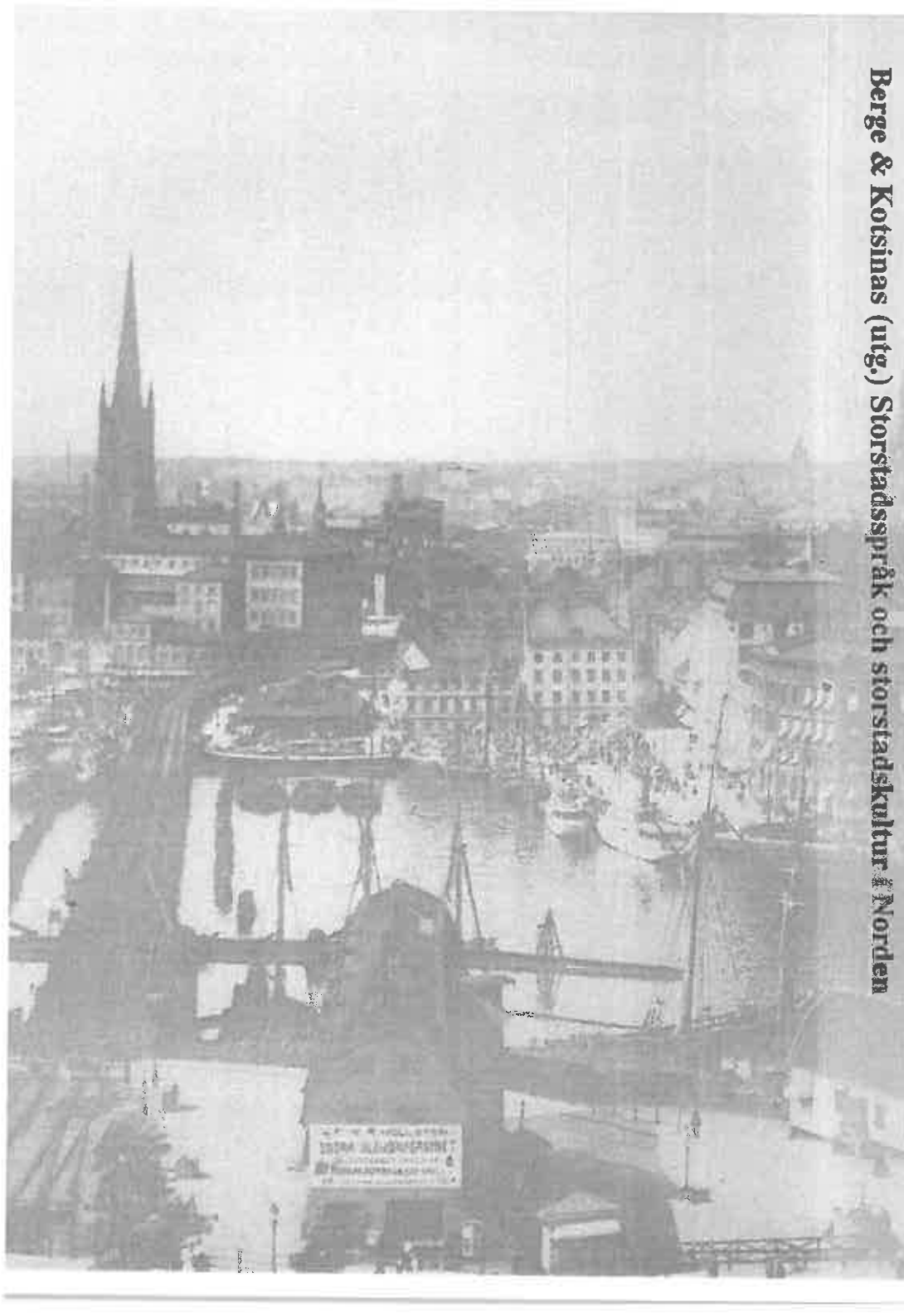

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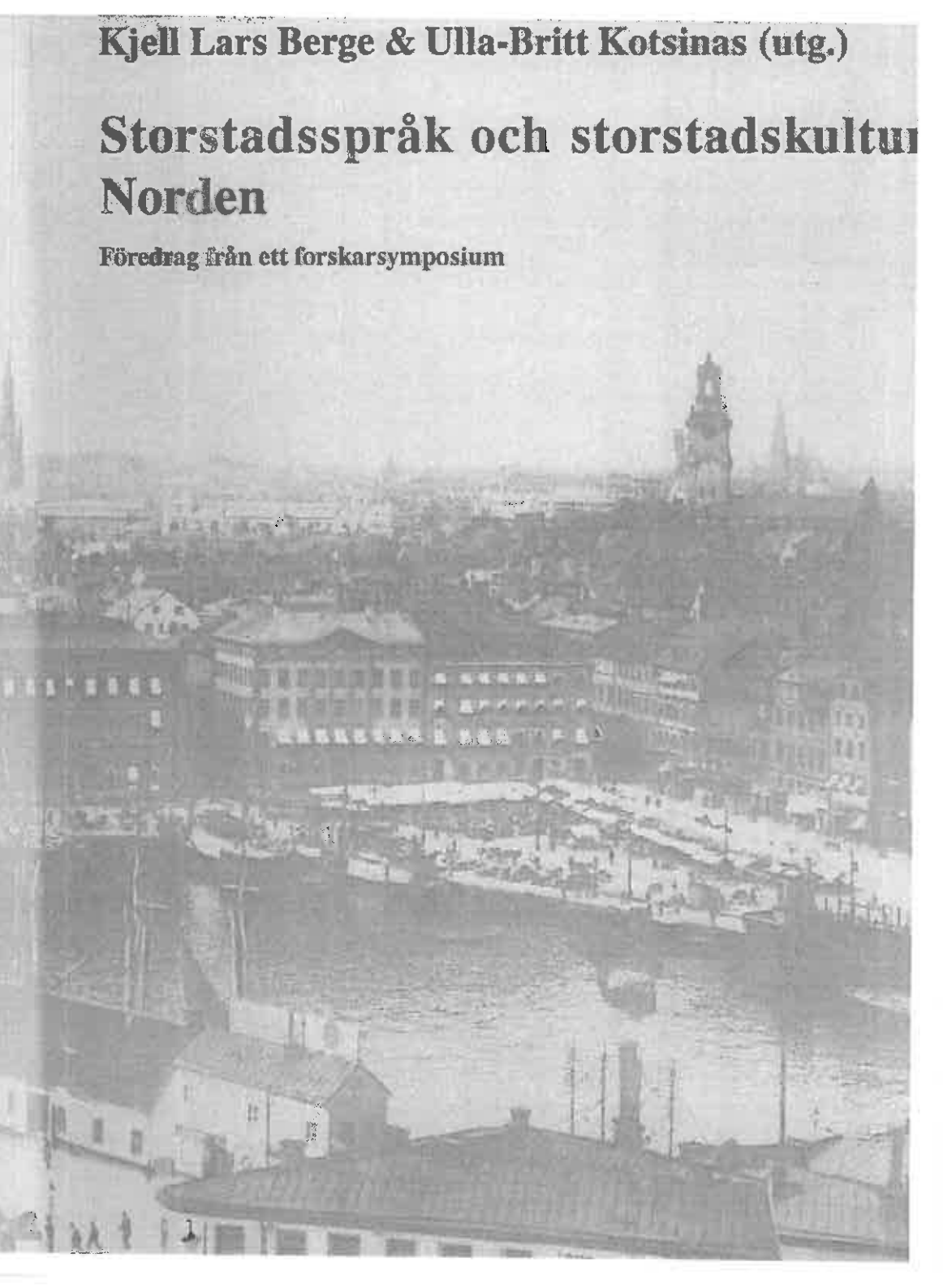

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COPENHAGEN AS A SPEECH COMMUNITY

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Our title consists of three content words, 'Copenhagen', 'speech' and 'community'. The collocation rules tell us that 'speech community' is one single entity and we shall treat it as such. This leaves us with two units to be explained, 'Copenhagen' and 'speech community', and a theme to be argued: Is Copenhagen really a speech community?

Copenhagen may be thought of roughly in three different ways, as a regional unit, as a sociological unit and as a state of mind.

Copenhagen as a regional unit

Regionally the story of Copenhagen is tedious, bordering on the banal, in that we find a pattern of development manifested by metropolises all over the western world. If you have read Frans Gregersen's paper in the *Tijdsschrift voor Skandinavistiek* you will know the whole dreary story, but just for the fun of it we repeat some of it here by way of showing some pictures:

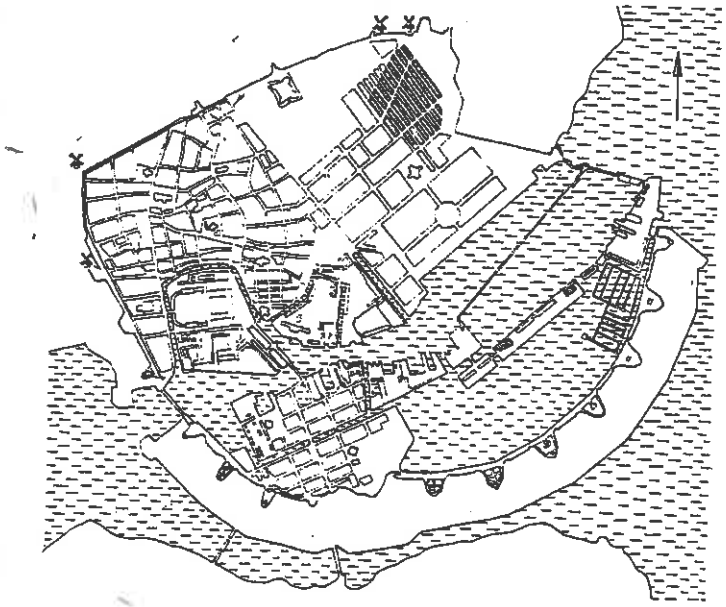


Fig.1. Copenhagen 1757, after Vasström 1985

First, we see the small focussed town, densely populated but with no discernible regional differentiation except for Nyboder, the quarter reserved for the workers of the Royal navy and, incidentally, the site for our research project. You find Nyboder in the uppermost right hand corner. The next picture shows the city that resulted from the removal of the fortifications.

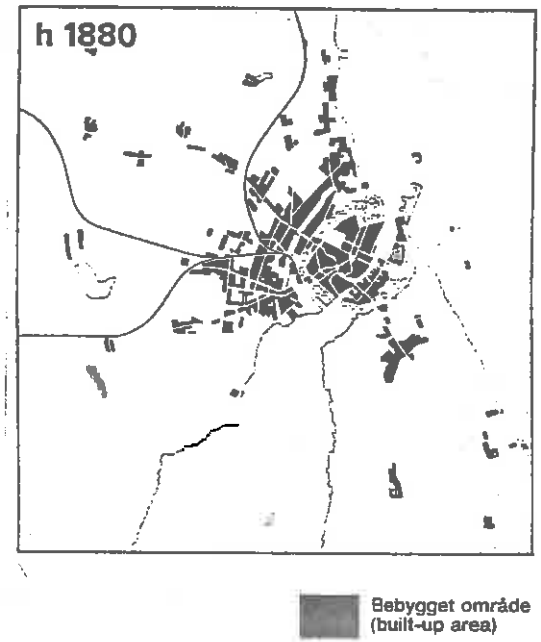


Fig.2. Copenhagen around 1880, after Gregersen 1989

Now workers' quarters have been established leading to regional and social differentiation within the metropolis. This is the typical melting pot city of the USA in its European form. The linguistic consequences of this type of city are as yet unknown.

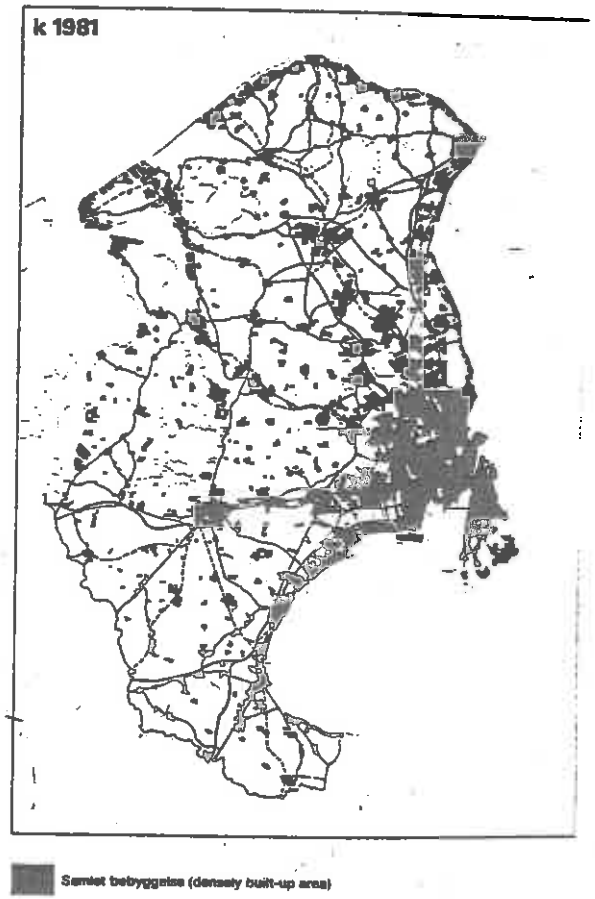


Fig.3. Copenhagen 1981, after Gregersen 1989

The last picture shows the exploded or fragmented metropolis spawning all over the east side of Sealand. The crucial question of what belongs to Copenhagen proper has become more or less meaningless. This leads us on to Copenhagen as a social phenomenon.

Copenhagen as a sociological unit

The town is a sociological unit in so far as it is different from the surroundings. Sociologically, the city is an assemblage of people united by a common distance from the countryside. This type of town may be focussed on commerce, on administration, on industry, or on all of them at once. For Denmark, it is obvious that Copenhagen is - and by the way has been for the past three hundred years - a disproportionally large assemblage of people focussed first on commerce, then including administration ('The King's Copenhagen'), and finally including industry as well.

Now, what happens when the industry is submitted to city planning and thus is allocated in the suburbs, when commerce is being progressively less placebound, and public administration is being decentralized? What happens is that the regional as well as the sociological frontiers between what is part of Copenhagen and what is not, give way to fuzzy notions of Copenhagen as a community. In one sense, Copenhagen is a region different from everything west of the Great Belt, in another sense the Copenhagen community is the inner city. In one sense, Copenhagen proper might be defined as Copenhagen and Frederiksberg, but in another sense all of Greater Copenhagen belongs to Copenhagen.

Copenhagen as a state of mind

Since the obvious definitions of Copenhagen are by now, as we have argued, obsolete or at least relative, we define contemporary Copenhagen as a state of mind. The Copenhagen state of mind is characteristic by having the pulse of a Metropolis and by being young, fast and aggressive, and at the same time the seat of the highest bourgeois culture. Above all, Copenhagen is the royal road for the influence from the foreign metropolises, first and foremost London and New York, which means that Copenhageners, in the sense of those identifying as Copenhageners, to the rest of Denmark represent the corrupted yet fascinating city way of life, whereas the Copenhageners regard Londoners or New Yorkers as being closer to the 'real thing'.

This creates difficulties for the selection of informants for empirical research, since Copenhagen as a state of mind is not easily identified in an individual. We have chosen instead to specify that all informants must be born and bred within the same specific inner city quarter, thus having no choice in their upbringing but to identify themselves as Copenhageners.

Now to the second content unit to be explained in this brief essay, the speech community. Since we are here to preach the gospel we might as well preach it according to Saint Joshua. He says :

"A speech community is one, all of whose members share at least a single speech variety and the norms for its appropriate use."
Fishman (ed.) 1971:232

In order not to beg the question, we note that Fishman has two pages earlier defined speech variety as a neutral term denoting 'a kind of language' (ibid.:226). As such, the definition connects two related fields of study: a speech community is the intersection of use of a specific kind of language and the sociological level of norms for appropriate behavior. Taking this definition as basic we might proceed as follows: Investigate all Danes as to what kinds of language they use and submit them to tests of attitudes towards the appropriate use of the type of speech they use.

Obviously, this idea is utopian as an empirical project, but it might be worth our while to make it as a thought experiment. What is evident is in fact, that if we define a type of speech as a cluster of for example phonetic features which vary significantly among the informants, we will find that almost all Danes would belong to a number of speech communities. They would belong to speech communities defined by sex, class, region and age just to name the most certain and conspicuous groups. So the gospel according to Saint Joshua makes Copenhagen as a speech community an empirical question: If those who are born and bred in Copenhagen do in fact diverge from those who are not, then and only then is Copenhagen a speech community. But the very notion of a speech community has undeniably lost some of its inherent attractions since there would be many such speech communities.

The problem here is one that Joshua Fishman is aware of, viz. that the term 'speech community' loses discriminatory power if it is being used at several levels at once. A nation may be a speech community but so may a small group of young delinquents, just so long as they share a specific language variety and particular norms. If we do not want this multibiguity we should start looking at the levels directly.

We have said earlier that Copenhagen could be defined as a state of mind, and that the linguistic behavior parallelling this state of mind could be found if we interviewed only people born and bred within the small section of Copenhagen which historically is Copenhagen proper, i.e. the inner city. Now, as everybody will realize who has read the papers in the volume from the Groningen conference (*TijdSchriftvoorSkandinavistiek* 10, 1-2), this strategy is already a bit out of date and it is becoming more so every day. This is due to the fact that the characteristic inner city communities are becoming less characteristic of urban life in general, and in this process they are rapidly losing their character as frames for a whole life. What happens is that the inner city sees a constant influx of young people who are born and bred in the suburbs, or witnesses the establishment of families who have spent some of their life outside Copenhagen. If this is right then it must mean that the individual cannot be

part of the Copenhagen state of mind for more than part of his life, whereas the older people we interviewed were Copenhageners to a man. If we notice also, that the typical close and multiplex networks that have been thought of as characteristically effective for maintaining speech norms and thus for reinforcing the social identity of the group (Milroy 1980), decay and lose ground only to be substituted by temporary network relationships, we may speculate that this must have some linguistic consequences.

The consequences that we hypothesized in the Copenhagen project would result from this, are that *the concept of style should be much more important in our research.*

Not only would this mean that the clear cut differences between social groups would be blurred, such that the differences would be rather quantitative than qualitative - this has been the *raison d'être* for the typical quantitative paradigm: The whole idea of investigating linguistic features instead of comparing individual systems as structures *suorum generum*, reflects the possibility of using single features as instruments for identificatory gestures or acts. A further consequence is that the individual would typically have more registers available to him or her. These registers are what we label as *styles.*

Styles are individual acts of identity in that we use them consciously or subconsciously to signal relationships towards those we talk to. We present ourselves as being some specific person and choose style according to the face we want the world to perceive. In tight knit groups there is not much need for style shifting, whereas the more loose knit a person's social surroundings are, the more style will have a role as a manifestation of how far we are willing to accomodate to the interlocutors. This should be conceptualized as a process, since all interlocutors progressively build up a communicative history as they proceed in the conversation.

If Copenhagen several years ago consisted of a number of smaller communities, each one characteristic by being inhabited by persons who stayed there for all of their lives, it would have been possible then to make a study of Copenhagen as a speech community simply by adding studies of these smaller speech communities. But there is still a mystery unsolved. How can we capture the notion of Copenhagen as being more than the simple addition of these smaller communities, that is as being a speech community that transcends the simple notion of common features. We have here to introduce the norm at a level which cannot be seen in interaction as something distinct from a pattern of results.

According to Coates and Cameron all classical i.e. Labovian sociolinguistic studies manifest results which may conveniently be summarized in this graph:

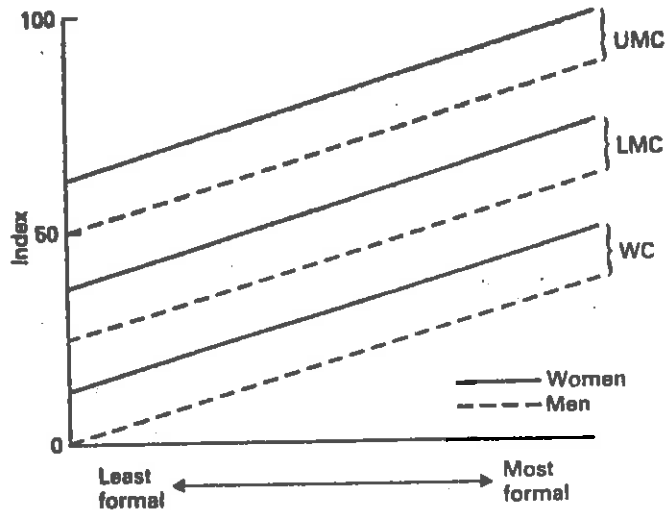
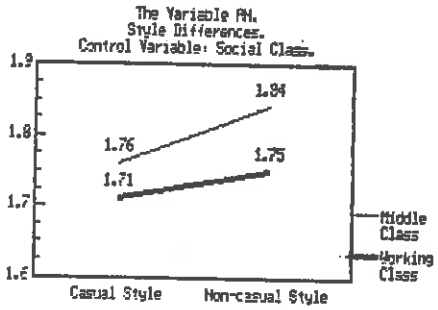


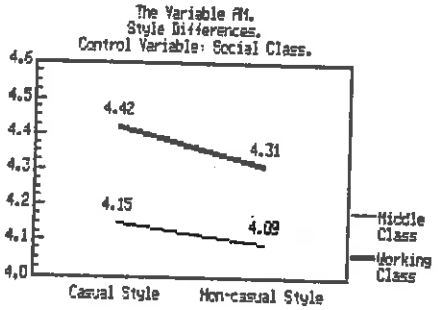
Fig.4. Schematic representation of variation, after Coates and Cameron 1989:16

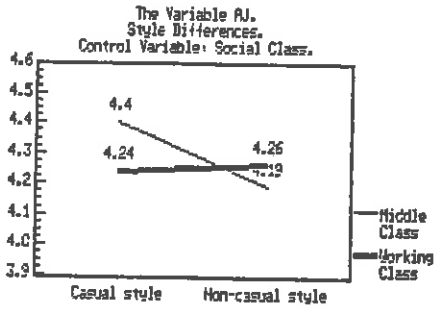
What we see here is that the direction of change is the same for all groups regardless of whether they start out at one or another level. The direction of change may be interpreted as follows:

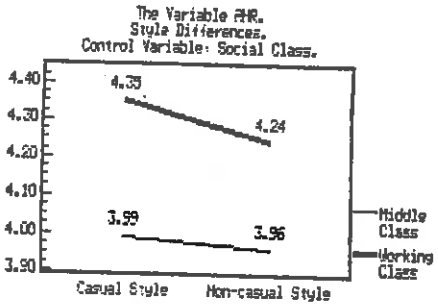
All groups want to sound more middle class when they have directed their full attention to their speaking style. This shows that the norm for all of them is the same. On the other hand, all groups change in the direction of the working classes when they relax, meaning that their authentic speech style is much more working class regardless of social status. The parallel lines suggest an almost universal agreement on the norm, the fact that there are differences as to level shows that social groups still have enough cohesion to need a marker.

This nice picture is unfortunately not quite the one we get in the Copenhagen study. Let us take a closer look at the four A-variables as studied by Henrik Holmberg.









The graphs on the page before are all of them part of Henrik Holmbergs chapter, Holmberg 1990, from *The Copenhagen Study* (forthcoming)

The graphs show the results of quantitative analysis of four A-variables. The first one, *AN*, is defined as <a> before alveolars and nil, the second is <a> before peripheral consonants, i.e. on the one hand the labials, on the other hand the velars, we call it *AM*, the third one is <a> before j which includes original velars (*AJ*), and the fourth one, *ANR*, covers the subsection of the AN-words which both have a <n> in the first syllable and a following <r>, type 'andre', 'vandre' etc.. Now take a closer look at the graphs: The dotted line in all cases represents a style defined by a number of criteria as non casual, whereas the solid line represents the casual style. If the two social groups now were in absolute agreement as to the norm, the two lines would be parallel.

This holds for the AN variable although the difference between the social classes is not significant. It also holds for the AM variable, and here the social class differences are clearly significant. But it does not hold for the AJ variable. Here we find a curious crossover pattern due to the style shift by the middle class group. It seems as if the AJ-variable is not at all style sensitive for the working class group, but on the contrary highly so for the middle class group. Finally, the ANR variable manifests the peculiar result of a working class with almost no style variation and a middle class with a conspicuous style difference, and all of this at two levels miles apart.

We might play with the idea of having separate norms for each variable or of defining speech communities specifically for certain variables, but all this would end in relativistic nonsense. What we shall say and mean from now on, is that a pattern where lines for the various groups do not have the same general direction, indicates that a change is taking place which has not yet been evaluated by the speech community in question. In this case, it seems as if the variable AJ is involved in such a beginning change.

All this just to lead up to the conclusion that IF Copenhagen as a state of mind is equal to a speech community, then it is certainly not correct to predict that all patterns will be classical. This must mean that a speech community may include different style shift patterns, provided that these patterns are interpretable. An extreme example of this is Rasmus A.

Rasmus A. - a case study of a deviant style shifter

Rasmus A. is one of the informants of the Copenhagen study. He is classified as a working class man, since he works as a cook and qualifies as working class on all objective class measures. He is, however, the son of a senior officer in the navy, which means that he was born into a middle class family. He rebelled against paternal authority, marrying into a typical working class family with which he now seems to identify.

His life history is, in fact, crucial if we want to understand what goes on in his particular case. Studying the style indices closely, we noted that ID no. 51, i.e. Rasmus, actually style shifted the "wrong" way on all the frequent variables except one. It is somewhat difficult to say which way is the wrong way in general, but we simply observed that where there is a prediction, ID no.51 goes against it; where there is no prediction, ID no. 51 diverges from his group mates and his age mates of the middle class.

In some instances, we may interpret Rasmus A.'s style shift pattern on the basis of our general knowledge of the speech community as supported by the figures. For the style shift pattern in the <a> variables we might hazard the following guess:

The facts: Rasmus A. is normally more working class in non-casual style than he is in his casual style.

The proposed interpretation: Evidently, Rasmus A. wanted to create the impression of being working class, which he cannot quite manage when he really wants to communicate things of emotional importance to his intimate stranger friend, the interviewer.

This proposal hinges on the adoption of the theory that the formal styles such as e.g. the style we have labeled non-casual style are the result of an intentional act, whereas the casual styles are rather like symptoms - they are produced without the speaker's will to do so. The theory - known as the attention to speech dogma (Bell 1984:147ff) - has been amply discussed in the literature. We do not endorse it. Rasmus A. may have been just as unconscious of what impression he made when he produced his non-casual style as when he started relaxing - perhaps the styles are just triggered by the topic under discussion.

A reverse style shift is not by itself an unknown phenomenon. In her study of the Frankfurt urban dialect, Eva Brinkmann to Broxten reports on two people who consciously chose to use their urban dialect at a public meeting, whereas they did not use it to the same extent by far when being interviewed by the author (Broxten 1986:11ff). In other words, these two people were able to put on a dialect guise in a formal speech event and they definitely wanted to create a certain impression (viz. being anti authoritarian). The interpretation of the case of Rasmus A. is parallel in that his index scores seem to convey a message contrary to the normal one.

On the whole, the members of a speech community share the evaluation of the different dialect guises, so that they all style shift the same way. Normally this will mean that members use the prestige variety in formal or non-casual speech. Again, this is normally the variety that the middle class members use - at least the middle class speech indicates the direction of the style shift. In the case of Rasmus A. the most obvious idea would be to argue that his deviance in this respect could be explained if we postulated that his background is more relevant as a determinant of his speech than his current occupation.

This seems like a good try, but unfortunately it is not correct, or rather it is too simple to explain the facts. If it were true that Rasmus A. was just an MC boy gone WC on the outside, this would, of course, support the ideologically heavy assumptions which attach to the notion of "authentic speech". His casual speech would reveal his true inner self.

But secondly, it would follow that the index scores for Rasmus A.'s casual style match those of his "true" class, viz. those of the MC Group IIa men. But compare the following figures:

Table iii.17. Index scores for Rasmus A. (ID no. 51) compared with those of the IIa MC men.

	Rasmus A	style diff.	MCmen	style diff.
AN, style 1:	**1.86**		**1.68**	
AN, style 2:	**1.64**	*-22*	**1.72**	*4*
AM, style 1:	**4.74**		**4.27**	
AM, style 2	**4.88**	*-14*	**4.15**	*12*
AJ, style 1:	**4.50**		**4.74**	
AJ, style 2:	**4.58**	*-8*	**4.55**	*19*
ANR, style 1:	**4.75**		**4.04**	
ANR, style 2 :	**4.88**	*-13*	**4.00**	*4*
ÅR, style 1:	**4.00**		**3.74**	
ÅR, style 2:	**4.00**	*0*	**3.73**	*1*
ÆRA, style 1:	**3.11**		**3.47**	
ÆRA, style 2:	**3.38**	*-27*	**3.33**	*14*
DÆR, style1:	**2.56**		**2.08**	
DÆR, style 2:	**2.06**	*50*	**2.44**	*-36*
RÆA, style 1:	**3.50**		**2.77**	
RÆA, style 2:	**3.75**	*-25*	**3.31**	*54*

From: Holmberg (forthcoming) In Gregersen and Pedersen (eds.): *The Copenhagen Study in Urban Sociolinguistics*, forthcoming.

As can be seen from the table, there is no straightforward explanation. Rasmus A.'s index scores are certainly not similar to those of his age mates from the middle class. Since his style shifting is the reverse of theirs, his figures will

always be inversely related to theirs, so that his casual index will remind more of their non-casual index. Even so, there is a world of difference between the actual scores. We can conclude, then, that it is not simply the case that a person's background means more than the present objective class position. The whole life history of an individual contributes to giving his or her index scores.

Taking the individual as the point of departure we seem to have two alternatives available when we wish to account for urban speech. Either we may presuppose the norm and concentrate on how it is maintained. If networks are not dense and multiplex, networks will not be very effective as norm maintenance instruments. This may lead to a situation where every linguistic feature that varies within the linguistic community our individual partakes in, is seen as a resource for acts of individual identity. This line of reasoning leads straight towards theories of face work like the famous Goffman theory.

What is absent from this viewpoint is the norm, it is presupposed as making the different interpretations of acts of identity possible. I cannot understand Rasmus A.s message if I do not know that his mean index values for certain variables style shift the "wrong" way. Actually, the field worker who made this interview, Jon Albris, noted that Rasmus A. sounded more like a worker when he was paying attention to his speech than when he was casual. Jon was a competent member of the speech community including Rasmus A., and thus was able to decode the message. This must be because he shares the linguistic norms which Rasmus uses in order to get his message across: Both Jon Albris and his interviewee Rasmus agree that low index values for the variable AN indicate WC values or identity, that high figures for AM indicate the same and so on. On the one hand Rasmus and all others are individuals - on the other hand all individuals are only understandable on the basis of a norm.

Conclusion

To conclude then, we started out by suggesting that the concept of a speech community was too multifarious to be of much help in delineating a population. We further suggested that a speech community is bound together by recognition of a common norm, that is what we mean by the expression of Copenhagen as being a 'state of mind'. We have shown then that the predictions based on this idea of a common norm are not borne out in our group of Copenhageners. Not all variables pattern the way they should.

On the other hand, we argued that style would have to be the focus for studies of urban speech, since the clear cut boundaries separating classical groups defined by social, sexual, geographical and chronological criteria are giving way to fuzzy sets having temporary memberships. This would seem to indicate that we shift the focus away from the speech community and the groups delineated by traditional speaker variables towards the individual as defined by his or her life history.

We do indeed recommend such a strategy, but in the last section of the paper we have attempted to show that both perspectives are necessary if we want to understand style shift patterns. There is no understanding without the basis of a norm and there is nothing to understand if we abstract from the individual's speech style and his or her style shifts.

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